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A

BRIEF STATEMENT

OF THE

GRIEVANCES

THE

CATHOLICS IN THESE REALMS

STILL LABOUR UNDER.

Fiat justitia, ruat cælum.

BY A CATHOLIC GENTLEMAN.

NEWCASTLE:

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AT a time like the present, when liberality of sentiment is the general topic of discourse, and unanimity and concord among all ranks so necessary ; it must appear paradoxical to every thinking mind, that rancour should be daily poured out, and that unfounded prejudices should be still held by many protestants, against a very large and respectable body of his majesty's British subjects ; whose ad-

herence to the religion of their ancestors, and whose conscientious regard of their oaths, disqualifies them, not only from civil employment, but from every privilege of their fellow countrymen.

The nation is now divided into two parties; the one holding with the present ministers, that no further concessions should be made to the catholics; and the other are of opinion with the late ministers, that much greater concessions should be made them, and in time total emancipation. I may here truly assert that this is the most ardent wish of every individual catholic, from the peer to the peasant, throughout the united kingdom: and let this be but granted, concord

and unanimity will infallibly ensue. I would gladly ask any protestant, even the bishop of London himself, than whom the catholics have not a more inveterate adversary, and to whom also they may attribute the failure of the bill that was brought into parliament in their favour by the late ministers, by the futile scruples his lordship had instilled into the king's mind some time before, on the subject of his coronation oath. I would now ask his lordship, what danger would ensue to the established church from such concession? From the catholics of Great Britain certainly none; for however respectable they are on account of their property, in regard of their numbers they are

very far from being numerous, and no ways to be dreaded: the contrary, it is true, is the case in Ireland, where the catholics form four-fifths of its population; but then they possess very small comparative property with their protestant neighbours, and, therefore, are not in this respect much to be feared: moreover it is well known that the Irish catholics are only desirous of obtaining the same civil rights and privileges that their protestant fellow citizens enjoy; and that they have already bound themselves, by one of their oaths of allegiance, to defend the protestant government in church and state: and from the knowledge I have of many of them, I am fully persuaded that they

entertain no idea whatever of substituting the catholic to the protestant established religion in Ireland. It is also well known that the opinion held with regard to catholic emancipation, by his majesty's late ministers, is the same that was held by those great statesmen now no more, a Pitt, a Thurlow, a Cornwallis, a Burke, and a Fox; and the opinions of these illustrious characters fully justified them in their endeavours to bring about the measure, which would have been so conducive to the security and prosperity of the nation.

I will now state some of the many grievances, disabilities and restrictions, the catholics of these realms labour under at this day.

In the first place, the catholics are debarred from aspiring to any of the following high state offices ; such as lord high chancellor, prime minister, secretaries of state, first lord of the admiralty, chancellor of the exchequer, &c. &c. however well qualified they might chance to be by superior talents. What, does the catholic religion so far blunt the faculties of the mind, as to render all who profess that religion incapable of discharging these high offices ? If so, how happens it that they are so ably discharged by catholics in all catholic states ; who in all their transactions and treaties with his majesty's protestant ministers, prove themselves equal, and on many occasions, an overmatch for them ? 2dly, The

catholics are prevented from holding commissions in the army and navy, or places of trust or emolument. The catholic peer is debarred from sitting in the house of peers ! and the catholic commoner is debarred from sitting in the house of commons ! Nay more, he is debarred from his elective franchise ! in not being allowed to vote at an election for a representative in parliament !! A privilege that is oftentimes allowed to his poorest protestant tenants, or even to his menial servants, when of that religion ! Are not these severe grievances ? Are not these insupportable degradations ? What then must be the indignant feelings of a British catholic, at the time of a gene-

ral election? A proud day to the protestant freeholder, but to the catholic a time of humiliation. I am truly here at a loss for words to express my irritated feelings on such an occasion. I know it may be here said, that during the time of the late general election, in Yorkshire and in other counties, the oath of supremacy was not strictly enforced against the catholics, and that many were thereby admitted to vote: this will by no means palliate the partial and severe penalty, incapacitating the catholic from enjoying the highest privilege of a free-born Briton, that of voting for a representative in parliament. On what principle of reason, justice, and equity, can so unjust and partial a law, which solely affects the

catholic, be justified? Does not the catholic contribute as largely to the national taxes from his purse, according to his circumstances, as his protestant neighbour? Why then is he deprived of his native birth-right, of choosing a representative in parliament? What, is the catholic ever to remain the victim of protestant prejudice, illiberality, and bigotry; and never to expect to have his grievances removed, as his majesty's present ministers seem to hold out? If so, in my opinion, perpetual exile from such a country, would be preferable to the protection it affords him in his state of thralldom.

However, I rejoice to think that many catholics, from this circum-

stance, and from their not being known to have been of that persuasion, voted on the last memorable election, in Yorkshire, for my Lord Milton ; and that all the opulent families of that persuasion within the county, “ with the exception of three or four who remained neuter,” warmly espoused his cause, and thereby very greatly contributed to his lordship’s being the returned member. An example proper to be followed by the catholics in every county of Great Britain, in all similar circumstances : and I hope and trust that the few families who remained neuter, will, whenever any future opportunity offers itself of assisting the friends of the late ministers, not fail to give them their active support

and interest, however they may feel themselves individually shackled by the oaths that are still in force against them : and that every catholic, to a man, throughout the united kingdom of Great Britain, will concur in giving his most strenuous support to the party of his majesty's late ministers and their friends, who, with so much generosity, magnanimity and disinterestedness, sacrificed their places in defending their cause. What, it may be said, are all the members of the late ministry become all at once converts to the catholic persuasion, " with the exception of " three of them ?" No, certainly not. But they are become converts to a system of conciliation and mildness ; and think that four millions of Irish catholics

should be no longer governed with a rod of iron: but that gentle and mild measures should be pursued with them, as the best means of ensuring their affectionate attachment to a protestant government: and that a contrary conduct long persisted in, will at some future period drive them to desperation.

I have as yet said little as to all the consequences that are attendant on the restrictions and disabilities which the catholics in these realms are compelled to endure. Now I will suppose the case of a catholic gentleman of a small fortune of 700l. or 800l. per annum, who marries and has a family: how is he to provide for his sons? The army and navy are shut against them, nor are they allowed to hold any places of trust or

emolument under government. The law, it is true, is open to them to a certain limited extent; but there are few catholic young men who care to enter on so dry a study with so discouraging a prospect of success, and with the certainty of being stopt in their career, even should they chance to be endowed with the talents requisite to make a figure in that profession. The only profession in this country open to a catholic, is that of physic; but here again he is prevented from ever arriving at any eminence, by the prejudices his protestant neighbours ever entertain against his religious tenets; and who, therefore, seldom or ever employ one of that persuasion. Thus is the catholic in this country prevented from ever im-

proving his circumstances, as even should he chance to be endowed with great talents and genius, he can turn them to no profitable account to himself or to his family. In short, a British catholic is made in his own native country a complete alien and foreigner; nay, worse, a foreigner who comes into England is courted and carested; but the company of the native alien is often shunned by his protestant fellow-countrymen.

These must be allowed to be very severe hardships: now I appeal to the candour of every protestant of the established church in the united kingdom, to declare whether the catholics deserve from their hands such severe and oppressive treatment; and on what

account, and for what crimes, and misdemeanors, they are now suffering these galling penalties? Conscious as I am of the rectitude, and of the unshaken and constant loyalty of the catholics of these realms, I know not what answer can be returned to these queries; but I leave them to be answered by my protestant fellow-countrymen.—I must now proceed to state another subject of grievance which the catholic labours under, which is, that the prejudice which is instilled into the minds of all protestants, from their earliest infancy, and during the time of their scholastic education, is ever after greatly enhanced by the misrepresentations and ca-

lumnies which are charged on their religious tenets. Even on a late occasion, a high dignitary of the protestant church, has not thought it below his rank, to condescend to traduce and misrepresent, in a late publication, many of the tenets of the catholic religion ; but as I am not desirous of acting the part of a controvertist, I will refer all persons who may wish to read an answer to them, to a publication entitled, “ Remarks on a charge delivered by the bishop of Durham,” wherein these calumnies, and misrepresentations, are completely refuted : and again, very lately the bishop of Rochester, at a confirmation meeting, held in a church of his diocese, proposed to his clergy there assembled,

from the very altar, an address against the catholics to the king: so very indecorous a proceeding, could not escape the animadversion of one of his own clergy. I have now briefly laid before my protestant fellow countrymen, some few of the many grievances the catholics of Great Britain still labour under, in the hope of convincing them of the propriety and justice of removing entirely the restrictions and disabilities they still labour under, particularly as the Irish catholics have been relieved from many of them by their former parliament. The Irish catholics are allowed in Ireland to enter the army, and navy, to vote for representatives in parliament, to possess

places of emolument, to be magistrates, &c. &c.

These are very great and invaluable privileges. And why have they not been also extended to Great Britain? Have the British catholics shewn for these last fifty years back, less attachment and submission to a protestant government, than their brethren in Ireland? No : why then are these privileges refused them ? I fear that it must appear to a discerning mind, that to the increasing strength and numbers of the former, these concessions were more to be attributed, than to any partiality in their favour. I would now readily appeal to the candour of every protestant of the established church in these realms, to state on what ground of

equity, justice, or reason, a protestant ministry, in these critical times, can any longer withhold emancipation from the catholics, when such a measure would ensure the unanimous and cordial co-operation of many thousands, nay millions, of long unjustly persecuted and enthralled fellow-subjects, who, in shaking off their fetters, would feel themselves as it were regenerated, and would stand forth with alacrity in defence of their country, inflamed and animated with the resolution of defending the newly acquired rights which they had been so many years struggling to obtain. It may be asked here, what, would not the protestant established church in Ireland be endangered by the concession of catholic eman-

cipation, even allowing that no such danger would ensue from the concession of such a measure to the catholics of Great Britain, on account of the comparative smallness of their numbers? I would answer no: but if their claims be much longer resisted, I shall then be of the contrary opinion. They are now only seeking to obtain all the same rights and privileges their protestant fellow-subjects enjoy; and why should not these be now granted to them? They are as willing to be governed by protestant as by catholic governors. The policy, the justice, and the necessity of this measure have been declared by many of the ablest statesmen of the nation, in the last and present century; and have not Lords Gren-

ville, Holland, Howick, and Messrs Windham, Sheridan, Whitbread, &c. &c. all declared in parliament over and over again, the necessity of immediately granting emancipation to them; and that unless it be granted, there will be no security for the nation in these momentous times? I most earnestly hope that the nation will be convinced of the necessity of this measure, and grant it before it be too late.

The objections that have been made against the catholic religion, on the head of its inculcating principles inimical to freedom, and to the prosperity of the state in which it is professed, are by no means founded in truth: it adapts itself to every species of government under which it happens to be

professed, whether monarchical, mixt, or republican. I would here ask what was the religion of the Britons at the time magna charta was granted to them? Catholic. What was their religion when the famous battles of Cressy and of Agincourt were fought? Catholic. And latterly, in these our times, have not the catholics shewn themselves equally brave with their protestant fellow countrymen, in Egypt; aboard the fleet under Nelson; at Monte Video; and in Calabria, at Maida, where 4000 British troops defeated and cut to pieces a French army of nearly 8000 men; and of the 4000 British troops, 3000 were Irish catholics? Are not such defenders to be relied on in the hour of danger?

The present ministers, in their speeches in Parliament on the state of Ireland, vainly attempt to persuade the British public, that the bulk of the catholics in Ireland are indifferent about obtaining emancipation. In opposition to such unfounded assertions, I will take upon myself to declare, that there is not a single catholic in Ireland, or in the three united kingdoms, who does not at this time, as well as the writer of these sheets, ardently long to be freed from his present degraded state of bondage. Some faint idea may be formed of the high value they set upon it in Ireland, by the very elegant and magnificent present of a gold vase, value one thousand pounds

sterling, that has been presented by the catholics of the county of Tipperary, to Col. Mathews, for his constant services in defending their injured cause.

I feel I cannot here close this public appeal, without returning my individual, and I trust I may say the individual and cordial thanks of all the catholics of his majesty's dominions, to my Lord Grenville, Lord Howick, to Messrs Windham, Sheridan, and Whitbread, &c. &c. and to his majesty's late ministers and their friends, for the warm and active support they have on so many late occasions given, both while in and out of power, to the catholic cause; and I think under so able a patronage it must finally

prosper : under this impresson, at this momentous crisis, I would exhort every individual catholic in the united kingdom, to forget for the present his own personal sufferings, and strenuously unite hand and heart, with his protestant fellow subjects, in defending his king and country.

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